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History of the Mills on the Monocacy River.

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## HISTORY OF MILLS ON THE MONOCACY RIVER.

The Monocacy valley, lying principally in what is today Frederick County, Maryland, was little more than a wilderness in the middle of the eighteenth century. The Indians roamed a great portion of the valley, thinking that they were quite secure in the great virgin forests. Soon, however, settlers began to drift down from Pennsylvania, and others followed up the Potomac in search of land, as the great plantations had rapidly taken up the lands of the tidewater sections.

These people at once set to clearing the lands along the Monocacy and its tributaries. The roads which were little more than trails, were in wretched condition and practically impassable during the winter months for wagons. Natural resources of iron ore, timber, stone, and good agriculture lands were right at hand, so the people being shut off from the outside markets became practically independent. Each neighborhood would have its own smelter, tannery, blacksmith and forge shops, harness shops, wagon shops, in fact everything that was necessary for their simple daily life.

Mills were also needed to grind the corn and wheat into meal and flour. The early pioneers soon recognized the dormant power lying in the numerous streams emptying into the Monocacy and mills sprang up in every community. By 1796 there were thirty-seven grist mills operating in the valley. These early mills soon came to be the greatest institutions in the territory. Their importance is shown by the fact that in many instances a community would be named after the mills about which it was centered, such as Parks Mills and Greenfield Mills in the southern part of the county, and



Utica Mills, Shyrocks Mills, Martin Mills, and Highland Mills in the north. The villages still go by these names today, even though no trace of the mill may now exist.

These early mills were of importance other than from an industrial standpoint. They served as a general meeting place, long before the country store came into existence. The farmers going to the mills with their saddle bags filled with grist in exchange for meal or flour would linger a bit to discuss national politics or gather any outside news that had filtered in, and perhaps a bit of local gossip. If an old homestead would be too small to provide entertainment the mill was used to provide sufficient space for dancing. Furthermore, it is said that the thick stone walls often afforded protection from the early Indian raids.

These structures were generally built of limestone, but sometimes brick or wood would be used for the superstructure. One or more wooden overshot wheels from twelve to twenty feet in diameter would constitute the prime movers for the running of the mills, or if the head of water would not be great enough the old breast wheel would be resorted to. Great burrs measuring from three to six feet in diameter and about ten inches thick were used to grind the grain. Some of these old burrs may yet be seen lying against the remains of an old decaying mill. If a mill had only one run of burrs the great mill stone needed to be resharpened to suit the need of each particular grain. This was done by the making of different sizes of radial grooves in the revolving stone to produce different grades of fineness. The timbers used for the columns and beams, or the frame work if the mill were frame, were great hewn logs seemingly large enough to withstand twice the loads to which they were subjected. A large part of the machinery in

addition to the water wheels was made from stout hickory wood. The shafts, pulleys and even the gear wheels and their teeth were sometimes all of wood in the earlier mills.

As greater tracts of lands became cleared and devoted to agriculture, the mills were enlarged and a surplus of flour and meal produced, the disposition of which became quite a problem. Favorable markets were located at Georgetown, Alexandria or Baltimore, but the overland haul was a long tedious process. The Monocacy River was navigable for flatbottomed boats for about forty miles above its mouth. Thus some of the flour was floated down to the Potomac and thence by the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal into Georgetown, where the boat, which would be little more than a raft, would be salvaged and sold for lumber. About 1790 a series of dams were built in the upper Monocacy to provide sufficient water to float the boats. This, however, proved unsatisfactory so the teams were again used. The Baltimore-Frederick Turnpike was soon afterwards established and the Old Liberty Road improved which made hauling much easier. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad was laid through the county about 1835 with the Frederick spur soon to follow, which furnished better transportation.

According to Scharf's "History of Western Maryland", the Linganore Mills located on Monocacy Creek is the oldest mill of any considerable size in the river basin. The exact date of its erection is unknown, but it is known to have been established well over a century and a half ago. In 1882 this was the largest mill operating in Frederick County. The building was a five story brick structure, using six runs of burrs capable of producing two hundred and forty barrels of flour per day. Three twelve foot overshot wheels were used to turn its large number of burrs.





Ceresville Mill

Another of the early established mills and one of the few that is still operating is located at the junction of Israel Creek and the Monocacy River. The first mill was a one story brick structure built about 1790 which was razed in 1812 to make way for the existing four-story limestone building. Two runs of burrs were used, capable of producing fifty barrels of flour daily. Two wooden overshot water wheels were first used, which were discarded for steel overshot wheels, which in turn were replaced by a vertical turbine, so that now, it operates partially by the water turbine and partially by steam. In 1887, the rollers were placed in the mill instead of the burrs, and about this time rollers were installed in practically all the mills along the waters of the Monocacy. These were a great improvement over the burrs in that a better grade of flour was produced and in a shorter time. The mill is now owned by Edward D. Schriner, a direct descendent of its first owner and operator. About 1870 the Schriner family purchased the large Linganore Mills as well as the Franklin Mills, a mill built in 1828 producing around 60 barrels of

flour daily. This system of mills became quite well known in Baltimore, and because of the high quality of the flour produced, the flour became much sought after there. Offices were set up in that city as well as in Frederick for the flour distribution. It is said some of the flour produced even found its way to New York City for consumption.

One of the most interesting of these earlier mills, destroyed by fire only a few months ago, was located in Frederick City. It was known as the Old Town Mill or the Zentz Mill and was a familiar landmark in Frederick town. This was an old stone building bearing the date of 1787 over its doorway. Some historians claim that it is even older than this date implies. (Another mark of its age lies in the fact that it existed during Indian raids, its secret recesses being used as hiding places



Old Town Mill

for valuables. The power was primarily supplied by an overshot wheel but around 1900 the mill race was filled in for civic improvement, and the power since then was derived from steam. The mill site has recently become valuable as a residential location, so the mill was discontinued and preparations were being made for its removal when it burned.



The Utica Mill on Fishing Creek, built around 1800 and razed in 1924 is interesting because the brick used in its construction were burnt in a kiln not a quarter of a mile from the mill site, in contrast to the brick used along the Atlantic Seaboard which were shipped from England. Corn now grows where the mill once stood, and the only sign that a mill ever existed here is the empty mill race winding along the hill bordering the creek.

About a mile east of Buckeystown there is found Michael's Mill, built against a steep bluff, practically the only mill that is now standing directly on the Monocacy. Its stone walls literally rise from the water's edge for about twenty feet, where the walls are level with the roadway which is carved across the face of the bluff. The walls of the base measure three feet in thickness seemingly as strong as when they were built. The stories above the road level are of frame construction and have been destroyed by fire several times. Tradition states that the building was burnt by a disgruntled slave woman a few years prior to the Civil War. The building was rebuilt when the same woman burnt it the following year. The water in the river is said never to have been too low to turn the great wheels. Here again the turbine has taken the place of the cumbersome overshot wheels. At present the mill is operated by a tractor, because of a break in the dam. However, it is thought that it will be repaired in the near future, and water power again used.

Another of the early mills was built in 1790 by Moses Lugenbeel in the village of Unionville. This too, was burned in 1870 and was rebuilt by George Duddear, the owner at that time. Duddear according to the records was an experimental man, and not content with the prosaic flour milling, he tried grinding bark and sumac for a time. He even tried



Michael's Mill (Front View)



Michael's Mill (Side View)



tanning calf skins with terra juponica, but at length abandoned his experiments and devoted his mill to chopping. The upper story of the building was cleared of machinery and turned into a community hall which was used for singing schools, debating clubs, concerts, minstrel shows or any kind of indoor entertainments. The structure was recently razed, the salvaged materials being used for the building of a hay barrack.

An old stone mill, built about 1800 and known as the "Wormen Mill" may yet be seen standing on the Gettysburg Road a few miles north of Frederick. This mill stopped producing flour about 1900 and lay idle for a long time until recently the owner of the farm upon which it is built reset the great



"Wormen Mill"

twenty foot overshot wheel to grind corn for his personal use. This is one of the few overshot wheels that ever now turns.

Continuing on this road to Lewistown we see the old frame mill that was first built in 1824, located on Fishing Creek. This old mill is still operated during the summer months for chopping dairy feed and grinding corn for local trade. The dam for this mill is about one half

mile away and is a rock and earth filled crib made of two by twelve timbers held in place by iron bars. This crib is backed by earth over which a road is built.



Mill at Lewistown



The Nearby Dam



The mills continued to grow in number and size from their early days reaching their height about the middle of the nineteenth century when the census gave the number of grist mills at about eighty operating under water power. In 1810 the flour mills far outranked any other business by producing \$750,000 worth of flour per year as against the next greatest industry of tanning which carried on a business amounting to \$140,000 yearly.

The mills continued to flourish and do profitable business until the beginning of the twentieth century, since when they have been steadily declining. Many were razed by fire never to be rebuilt, as for example the great mill at Greenfield within a few miles of the Potomac, which was burned about thirty years ago.

The establishment and improvement of the great western mills tended to bring about the decay of the small milling business. The people in the eastern states preferred the flour made from the hard spring wheat to that ground in the local mills. Neither was the miller of a twenty-five barrel capacity mill able to compete with the great steam mills of the west or even those in the large eastern cities.

In addition to this, the extensive work done in road improvement has enabled the farmer to ship the grain to the Baltimore market where it can be ground or shipped abroad, the Baltimore market being much higher than the small miller would be able to pay.

The story of the last days of the mills is the same for each. The old established mills that once ran twenty-four hours a day to produce their full capacity are but ghosts of their former selves. A very few are producing flour and then only on a small scale, directing most of their efforts towards producing dairy and chicken feed. Others only partially operate,

then only for local consumers of meal or feed, while the majority are entirely abandoned and even torn and burned down so that no trace of them is now to be seen.

Thus the activity of these picturesque old mills, once playing such an important role in the lives of the early settlers has practically become a closed chapter in the history of time.



"An Old Abandoned Mill"

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